

Victoria Dock Berth Holders' Association (VDBHA)
Chair's Report, AGM, 2023

A great relief over the last 12 months is that staff and berth holders in Victoria Dock have been able to carry on their activities relatively normally now that the disruption caused by the Covid pandemic has largely subsided. Our thanks go to all those who cooperated so patiently over that very trying time.

The purpose of the VDBHA, is, as you know, to liaise between berth holders on the one hand, and the Caernarfon Harbour Trust (CHT) and Gwynedd Council on the other. Over the past year this linkage has enabled the current VDBHA Executive Committee to operate reasonably smoothly. This has been due very largely to the work of our predecessors in the VDBHA and I'd like to mark my sincere appreciation to the efforts of the following:

First John O'Sullivan who, in effect, set up the VDBHA, and secondly, our immediate predecessors, in particular Chris Jones and John Whitaker. Over two years of the very difficult Covid period Chris and John worked indefatigably to uphold the interests of berth holders in their negotiations with Gwynedd Council.

The current Executive Committee (EC) has reaped the reward of the efforts and frustrations of our predecessors, in the form of clear channels of communication with Caernarfon Harbour Trust and Gwynedd Council. We have also benefitted from good relations established with Dock Master Iwan Rees-Jones, Harbour Master Dave O'Neil, and especially the Gwynedd County Maritime Officer, Barry Davies – who retired on March 31st. On behalf of the VDBHA EC I'd like to thank Barry for his cooperation and his time over the last year. He has been crucial in pushing for berth holders' interests on many fronts, but particularly as regards maintaining the parking permits regime (6 months free and a further 6 months for £70 in various Gwynedd Council carparks). Barry has also worked with the EC and our Honorary Secretary Kathy Jones on the improvement of the toilet block facilities. Here it may be worth pointing out a flaw in our representations to the CHT as I suspect that the majority of voting berth holders are men, which may mean that the opinions of women are under-represented.

My diary shows we have had eight get-togethers of various kinds over the last 12 months either as regular VDBHA EC meetings or as extra-ordinary meetings with the Harbour Master, the Dock Master or the Maritime Officer. We've met by Zoom, on Kathy's boat, and in the Harbour Master's office. Among the topics we've covered are gate opening times for the Dock, car-parking, toilets, security, Vic Dock fees, and effluent. There is more detail on these matters in the analysis of the survey.

The fact that berthing fees are going up will come as no surprise to anyone. It comes in the context of a very tight financial situation, where Brexit has led indirectly to a reduction in funding for the Welsh Assembly with concomitant knock-on effects to Gwynedd Council, the ultimate masters of Victoria Dock. Trickle-down shortage of money seems to work much more quickly than trickle-down abundance of money! We can of course appeal against the increases, but we should bear in mind that Victoria Dock is still the one of best value marinas in North Wales. Move to Conwy Marina, and you'll pay around double.

A related point that some people have mentioned is the situation at Felinheli / Port Dinorwic Marina which is now owned by Port Dinorwic Marina, Ltd., a subsidiary of the Marine and Property Group. There was concern that the problematic financial position at Felinheli would have a negative knock-on to Caernarfon Harbour Trust and Victoria Dock berth holders. We have been assured that this will not be the case.

Of course there remain some matters that need attention over the coming year – among them are: preventing storm surges from entering the dock, enhancing security, and optimising toilet facilities, together perhaps with further discussion of the CHT Customer Charter, and enhancing contact with the people and institutions of Caernarfon. Although as Chris pointed out in the last Chair's report, public bodies tend to move rather slowly, especially where money is concerned, I am hopeful that, with the present level of engagement from the VDBHA on one side, and the CHT and Council on the other, the VDBHA will continue to make progress to the benefit of its members. There is a wealth of experience within the VDBHA membership which could perhaps be drawn on to a greater extent by the EC and indeed by CHT and the Council as we go forward.

Finally, I'd like to thank Chris again for preparing such a smooth way ahead for the current Executive Committee, to John Whitaker for doing likewise and also for continuing to work on our Website and our Survey, to Kathy Jones for her selfless work as Secretary, and to Keith Elford for his competence in keeping our finances in good order. In addition, of course, Iwan and Dave deserve our gratitude for their time and cooperation, while Barry has worked away, more often than not in the background, to ensure a fair and decent deal for berth holders in Victoria Dock. Let's hope there is enough willingness among VDBHA members to enable the Association to continue to make progress in the future.

Eddie Williams
Chair, VDBHA
March, 2023